Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009

Message Text

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S E C R E T STATE 178646

STADIS//
EXDIS, FOR AMBASSADOR ONLY FROM HOLBROOKE

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: VM, AS, OVIP, PHAN HIEN

SUBJECT: LETTER TO FOREIGN MINISTER PEACOCK

1. I AM FORWARDING BY POUCH A LETTER TO BE DELIVERED TO FOREIGN MINISTER PEACOCK REGARDING THE FORTHCOMING VISIT TO AUSTRALIA OF VIETNAMESE DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER PHAN HIEN. I AM NOW UNAWARE OF THE EXACT DATES FOR HIEN'S VISIT. IF HIEN ARRIVES BEFORE THE POUCHED LETTER, PLEASE DELIVER A COPY OF THIS CABLE TO PEACOCK.

2. TEXT OF LETTER FOLLOWS: QUOTE.

JULY 20, 1977

THE HONORABLE ANDREW PEACOCK
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AUSTRALIAN MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS
CANBERRA, AUSTRALIA

DEAR ANDREW:

SINCE PHAN HIEN WILL BE PAYING A VISIT TO CANBERRA SOON, I THOUGHT IT MIGHT BE USEFUL FOR YOU TO HAVE MY SENSE OF HIM

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AS WELL AS SOME BACKGROUND ON OUR EFFORTS TO NORMALIZE
RELATIONS WITH VIETNAM.

HIEN IS AN EXPERIENCED DIPLOMAT -- CAUTIOUS, PRECISE, WELL-
PREPARED, AND ABLE TO USE WHATEVER FLEXIBILITY HE HAS TO
FULL ADVANTAGE. HE HANDLED THE VISIT OF THE WOODCOCK
COMMISSION TO HANOI IN MARCH WITH GREAT SKILL. THEIR PRO-
GRAM WAS EXTREMELY WELL ORGANIZED AND THE DELEGATION WAS
CHARMED BY HIS GRACIOUSNESS AND WIT. I WOULD JUDGE HIM TO
BE A TOP-NOTCH BUREAUCRAT BUT NOT A MEMBER OF THE SRV'S
POLICY-MAKING COUNCILS. HIEN SPEAKS ENGLISH QUITE CAPABLY
BUT PREFERS TO DO BUSINESS IN VIETNAMESE THROUGH AN INTER-
PRETER. HIS FRENCH IS EXCELLENT.

YOU ARE FAMILIAR WITH THE RESULTS OF THE TWO PARIS
MEETINGS AND I WOULD ONLY PASS ON SEVERAL OBSERVATIONS.
FIRST, HIEN DOES NOT APPEAR TO HAVE A LONG LEASH; WHILE
NOT CONFINED TO QUOTING PREPARED TEXTS, HE DID NOT STRAY
FAR FROM HIS TALKING POINTS. THE STICKING POINT NOW IN
NORMALIZATION IS OBVIOUSLY VIETNAMESE INSISTENCE ON A FIRM
COMMITMENT OF AMERICAN AID AS A CONDITION FOR ESTABLISH-
MENT OF DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS. WITH ONE EXCEPTION THE
VIETNAMESE HAVE REFRAINED FROM USING PRIVATELY OR PUBLIC-
LY THE TERM "REPARATIONS," REFERRING INSTEAD TO THE U.S.
OBLIGATION "TO HEAL THE WOUNDS OF WAR." WE APPRECIATE
THEIR SUBTLETY BUT THE FACT REMAINS THAT THEIR INSISTENCE
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ON AID AS A PRECONDITION, HOWEVER IT IS COUCHED, HAS LED
TO AN IMPASSE IN NEGOTIATIONS.

AS YOU KNOW, THE IDEA OF AID AS A CONDITION IS SIMPLY
UNACCEPTABLE TO THE CONGRESS OR THE AMERICAN PUBLIC, AS
WELL AS THE ADMINISTRATION, AT THIS TIME. THE VIETNAMESE
SEEM TO BELIEVE THAT THEIR PERSISTENCE WILL LEAD TO A
CHANGE IN POSITION ON THIS VITAL POINT. THEY ARE WRONG;
THE MERE IDEA OF NEGOTIATIONS AND POSSIBLE RELATIONS WITH
VIETNAM -- NOT TO MENTION AID -- HAS CAUSED A MINI-FUROR
IN RECENT WEEKS ON THE HILL. FURTHERMORE, THE VIETNAMESE
PROPAGANDA PRONOUNCEMENTS BETWEEN THE MAY AND JUNE MEETINGS
GAVE A VOCAL MINORITY IN CONGRESS EXTRA AMMUNITION WITH
WHICH TO ATTACK THE BASIC CONCEPT OF U.S. CONTRIBUTIONS
TO INTERNATIONAL FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS. PRESIDENT CARTER
HAS BEEN FIGHTING HARD TO DEFEAT THIS LATTER CONGRESS-
IONAL EFFORT AND WE HOPE TO SUCCEED. IN SHORT, THE
VIETNAMESE HAVE BEEN MAKING THE WRONG NOISES ABOUT NORMAL-
IZATION, A PROCESS WHICH WOULD BE DIFFICULT TO CARRY FOR-
WARD IN THE U.S. TODAY UNDER THE BEST OF CIRCUMSTANCES.

WE HAVE EXPLAINED ALL THIS TO THEM AT LENGTH, AND THERE

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SHOULD BE NLACK OF UNDERSTANDING ON THEIR PART CONCERNING OUR DOMESTIC IMPERATIVES. WE HAVE MADE THE POINT THAT AMERICAN PRIVATE, HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE AND ASSISTANCE THROUGH INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS IS ALREADY POSSIBLE

AND THAT DIPLOMATIC RECOGNITION COULD CONCEIVABLY EASE THE WAY TOWARD SERIOUS CONSIDERATIONS OF GOVERNMENT-SPONSORED HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE IN THE FUTURE. THERE IS REALLY NO OTHER WAY TO PROCEED ON THIS ISSUE.

CONCERNING THE TRADE EMBARGO, WE HAVE PLEDGED TO REMOVE IT ONCE DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS ARE ESTABLISHED AND EMBASSIES OPENED. WE PERMIT EXCEPTIONS TO THE EMBARGO FOR HUMANITARIAN REASONS, AND IT APPLIES TO SUBSIDIARIES OF

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AMERICAN BUSINESSES ABROAD. THE PROSPECT OF LIFTING THE TRADE EMBARGO AFTER THE OPENING OF EMBASSIES SHOULD BE AN IMPORTANT INCENTIVE TO THE SRV. FOR EXAMPLE, AMERICAN OIL COMPANIES, WHICH ARE IN THE BEST POSITION TO EXPLOIT VIETNAM'S OIL POTENTIAL, CANNOT RESUME EXPLORATION -- AND FRANKLY, WOULD PROBABLY NOT BE INTERESTED IN THE ABSENCE OF CLEARLY IMPROVED RELATIONS.

I DO NOT WISH TO GIVE THE IMPRESSION THAT THE PARIS MEETINGS WERE WITHOUT POSITIVE RESULTS. ON THE CONTRARY, THE ATMOSPHERE WAS CORDIAL AND UNPOLEMIC. SINCE THE WOODCOCK VISIT THERE HAS BEEN GREATER PROGRESS MADE ON THE MIA ISSUE, AND WE ARE ENCOURAGED BY THIS. THE VIETNAMESE PROMISED TO RETURN THE REMAINS OF 20 MIA WITHIN SIXTY TO NINETY DAYS. THE BALL IS SQUARELY IN THEIR COURT AS TO WHEN WE SHOULD PICK THEM UP. IN THIS CONNECTION WE INVITED THEM TO SEND A TEAM TO HONOLULU TO SEE FIRSTHAND THE PROCEDURES OF THE JOINT CASUALITY RESOLUTION CENTER AND CENTRAL IDENTIFICATION LAB IN ORDER TO BETTER APPRECIATE WHAT CAN BE DONE IN THE IDENTIFICATION OF REMAINS.

WE INFORMED THE VIETNAMESE THAT WE WOULD NO LONGER BLOCK THEIR ADMISSION TO THE UN, AND THE SECURITY COUNCIL HAS ACTED FAVORABLY ON THE QUESTION. OUR PARTICIPATION IN THE CONSENSUS FOR SRV MEMBERSHIP--WHICH WE DID NOT TELL HANOI ABOUT IN ADVANCE--IS A CLEAR INDICATION OF OUR NEW ATTITUDE AND GOOD FAITH IN WANTING TO OVERCOME PAST DIFFERENCES.

NEITHER SIDE HAS PROPOSED A DATE FOR ANOTHER THIRD MEETING BUT MID-SEPTEMBER OR AFTER WOULD SEEM TO BE THE EARLIEST LOGICAL TIME, PERHAPS IN CONJUNCTION WITH VIETNAMESE ENTRY INTO THE UN. HOWEVER, SINCE THE CLIMATE IN

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CONGRESS IS FURTHER EXACERBATED BY CONTINUED HANOI DRUM-BEATING ON THE AID QUESTION, THE ENVIRONMENT FOR ANOTHER MEETING WOULD NOT BE THE BEST.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE? WE WOULD HOPE THAT THE VIETNAMESE ARE NOT DUG IN TOO DEEPLY ON THE AID QUESTION TO UNDERSTAND THE ADVANTAGES OF MOVING AHEAD NOW AS OPPOSED TO LETTING MATTERS DRIFT. THE LATTER WOULD PROBABLY CAUSE THE SITUATION TO BECOME SET IN CONCRETE RATHER THAN TO PRODUCE GREATER U.S. FLEXIBILITY. ALTHOUGH RELATIONS WITH THE SRV ARE DESIRABLE, THEY ARE NOT A NECESSITY FOR US.

ALL OF THE ABOVE, OF COURSE, IS FOR YOUR BACKGROUND. I HOPE YOU COULD FIND WAYS TO CONVEY TO PHAN HIEN, ABOVE ALL, THAT THE PRESIDENT IS SINCERE IN WISHING TO MOVE FORWARD, AND LEGITIMATELY CONSTRAINED BY LAW FROM TAKING CERTAIN ACTIONS WHICH HANOI STILL SEEKS. THOSE ACTIONS HE HAS TAKEN -- INCLUDING HIS RECENT DECISION TO JOIN IN THE CONSENSUS IN THE UN -- ARE EVIDENCE OF HIS GOOD WILL. IF YOU COULD URGE THE VIETNAMESE TO MOVE FORWARD, IT WOULD BE HELPFUL. I KNOW HE WILL NOT BE ABLE TO RESPOND, BUT THE MESSAGE WILL GET THROUGH -- AND IT MAY HELP. SINCERELY, RICHARD HOLBROOKE, BUREAU OF EAST ASIAN AND PACIFIC AFFAIRS. UNQUOTE. VANCE

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